

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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BY THE AUTHOR OF "VIXEN," "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.

CHAPTER VII. "HIS HERTE BATHED IN A BATH OF BLISSE."

DAPHNE'S boat came home from the builder's at the end of three weeks of longing and expectation, a light wherry-shaped boat, not the tub-like sea-going dingey, but a neat little craft which would have done no discredit to a Thames waterman. Daphne was in raptures; Mr. Turchill was impressed into her service, in nowise reluctant; and all the mornings of that happy June were devoted to the art of rowing a pair of sculls on the rapid Avon. Never had the river been in better condition; there was plenty of water, but there had been no heavy rains since April, and the river had not overflowed its natural limits; the stream ran smoothly between its green and willowy banks, just such a lenient tide as Horace loved to sing.

When Daphne took up a new thing it was a passion with her. She was at the exuberant age when all fresh fancies are fevers. She had had her fever for water-colours, for battledore and shuttlecock, for crewel-work. She had risen at day-break to pursue each new delight; but this fancy for the boat was the most intense of all her fevers, for the love of the river was a love dating from infancy, and she had never been able to gratify it thoroughly until now. Every evening in the billiard-room she addressed the same prayer to Edgar Turchill, when she bade him good-night: "Come as early as you can to-morrow morning, please." And to do her pleasure the Squire of Hawksyard rose at cock-

crow and rode six miles in the dewy morning, so as to be at the boat-house in Sir Vernon's meadow before Arden church clock struck seven.

Let him be there as early as he might Daphne was always waiting for him, fresh as the morning, in her dark blue cotton gown and sailor hat, the sleeves tucked up to the elbow to give free play to her supple wrists, her arms lily-white in spite of wind and weather.

"It's much too good of you," said she, in her careless way, not ungrateful, but with the air of a girl who thinks men were created to wait upon her. "How very early you must have been up."

"Not so much earlier than you. It is only an hour's ride from Hawksyard, even when I take it gently."

"And you have had no breakfast, I daresay."

"I have had nothing since the tumbler of St. Galmier you poured out for me in the billiard-room last night."

"Poor—dear—soul!" sighed Daphne, with a pause after each word. "How quite too shocking. We must institute a gipsy tea-kettle. This kind of thing shall not occur again."

She looked at him with her loveliest smile, as much as to say: "I have made you my slave, but I mean your bondage to be pleasant."

When he came to the boat-house next morning he found a kettle singing gaily on a rakish-looking gipsy-stove, a table laid for breakfast inside the boat-house, a smoking dish of eggs-and-bacon, and the faithful Bink doing butler, rough and rustic, but devoted.

"I wonder whether she has read Don Juan?" thought Edgar. The water, the gipsy

breakfast, the sweet face smiling at him, reminded him of an episode in that poem. "Were I shipwrecked to-morrow I would not wish to awaken in a fairer paradise," he said to himself, while Bink adjusted a camp-stool for him, breathing his hardest all the time. "This is a delicious surprise," he exclaimed.

"The eggs-and-bacon?"

"No; the privilege of a tête-à-tête breakfast with you."

"Tête-à-fiddlestick; Bink is my champion. If you are impertinent I will ask Mr. MacCloskie to join us to-morrow morning. Sugar? Yes, of course, sugar and cream. Aren't the eggs-and-bacon nice? I cooked them. It was Bink's suggestion. I was going to confine myself to rolls and strawberry jam; but the eggs-and-bacon are more fun, aren't they? You should have heard how they frizzled and sputtered in the frying-pan. I had no idea bacon was so noisy."

"Your first lesson in cookery," said Edgar. "We shall hear of you graduating at South Kensington."

"My first lesson, indeed! Why, I fried pancakes over a spirit-lamp ever so many times at Asnières; and I don't know which smelt nastiest, the pancakes or the lamp. Our dormitory got into awful disgrace about it."

She had seated herself on her camp-stool and was drinking tea, while she watched Edgar eat the eggs-and-bacon with an artistic interest in the process.

"Is the bacon done?" she asked. "Did I frizzle it long enough?"

"It's simply delicious; I never ate such a breakfast."

It was indeed a meal in fairyland. The soft clear morning light, the fresh yet balmy atmosphere, the sun-lit river and shadowy boat-house, all things about and around lent their enchantment to the scene. Edgar forgot that he had ever cared for any one in the world except this girl, with the soft grey eyes and sunny hair, and all too captivating smile. To be with her, to watch her, to enjoy her girlishness and bright vivacity, to minister to her amusement and wait upon her fancies—what better use could a young man, free to take his pleasure where he liked, find for his life? And far away in the future, in the remoteness of years to come, Edgar Turchill saw this lovely being, tamed and sobered and subdued into the pattern of his ideal wife, losing no charm that made her girlhood lovely, but gaining the holier graces

of womanhood and wifehood. To-day she was little more than a child, seeking her pleasure as a child does, draining the cup of each new joy like a child, and he knew that he was no more to her than the agreeable companion of her pleasures. But such an association, such girlish friendship so freely given, must surely ripen into a warmer feeling. His pulses could not be so deeply stirred and hers give no responsive throb. There must be some sympathy, some answering emotion in a nature so intensely sensitive.

Cheered by such hopeful reflections, Mr. Turchill eat an excellent breakfast, while Daphne somewhat timorously tried an egg, and was agreeably surprised to find it tasted pretty much the same as if the cook had fried it; a little leathery, perhaps, but that was a detail.

"I feel so relieved," she said. "I shouldn't have been surprised if I had turned them into chickens. And now, if you have quite finished, we'll begin our rowing. I have a conviction that if I don't learn to feather properly to-day I shall never accomplish it while I live."

The boat was ready for them, moored to a steep flight of steps which Bink had hewn out of the bank after his working hours. He had found odd planks in the wood-house, and had contrived to face the steps with timber in a most respectable manner, rewarded by Daphne by sweet words and sweeter looks, and by such a shower of shillings that he had opened a post-office savings-bank book on the strength of her bounty, and felt himself on the road to fortune.

There was the boat in all the smartness of new varnished wood. Daphne had given up her idea of a Pompeian red dado to oblige the boat-builder. There were the oars and sculls, with Daphne's monogram in dark blue and gold; and there, glittering in the sunlight, was the name she had chosen for her craft, in bright golden letters—Nero.

"What a queer name to choose," said Edgar. "He was such an out and out beast, you know."

"Not a bit of it," retorted Daphne. "I read an article yesterday in an old volume of Cornhill, in which the writer demonstrates that he was rather a nice man. He didn't poison Britannicus; he didn't make away with his mamma; he didn't set fire to Rome, though he did play the violin beautifully. He was a very accomplished young man, and the historians of his time were silly gobe

mouches, who jotted down every ridiculous scandal that was floating in society. I think that Taci—— what's his name ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Oh, Nero has been set on his legs, has he?" said Edgar carelessly, as he took the rudder-lines, while Daphne bent over her sculls, and began rather too vehemently to feather. "And I suppose Tiberius was a very meritorious monarch, and all those scandals about Capri were so many airy fictions? Well, it doesn't make much difference to us, does it; except that it will go hard with me by-and-by, when my boys come to learn the history of the future, to have the young scamps tell me that all I learnt at Rugby was bosh."

"At Rugby," cried Daphne, suddenly earnest. "You were at Rugby with my brother, weren't you? Were you great friends?"

Edgar leant over the boat, concerned about some weeds that were possibly interfering with the rudder.

"We didn't see much of each other. He was ever so much younger than I, you know."

"Was he nice? Were people fond of him?"

"Everybody was dreadfully sorry when he died of scarlet fever, poor fellow!" answered Edgar, without looking at her.

"Yes, it was terrible, was it not? I can just remember him. Such a bright handsome boy, full of life and spirits. He used to tease me a good deal, but that is the nature of boys. And then when I was at Brighton there came a letter to say that he was dead, and I had to wear black frocks for ever so long. Poor Loftus! how dearly I should have loved him if he had lived."

"Yes; it would have been nice for you to have a brother, would it not?" said Edgar, still with a shade of embarrassment.

"Nice! It would have been my salvation. To have some one of my own kindred—quite my brother. I love Madoline with all my heart and soul, but she is only my half-sister. I always feel that there is a difference between us. She is my superior. She comes of a better stock. Nobody ever talks of my mother, or my mother's family, but Lina's parentage is in everybody's mouth. She seems to be related, at least in heraldry, to everybody worth knowing in the county. But Loftus would have been the same clay that I am made of, don't you know, neither better nor worse. Blood is thicker than water."

"That's a morbid feeling of yours, Daphne."

"Is it? I'm afraid I have a few morbid feelings."

"Get rid of them. There never was a better sister than Madoline is to you."

"I know it. She is perfection; but that only makes her further away from me. I reverence her, I look up to her and admire her; but I can never feel on an equality with her."

"That shows your good sense. It is an advantage for you to have some one to look up to."

"Yes; but I should like some one on my own level as well."

"You've got me," said Edgar bluntly. "Can't you make a brother of me for the nonce?"

"For ever and always if you like," replied Daphne. "I'm sure I've got the best of the bargain. I don't believe any brother would get up at five o'clock to teach me to row."

Edgar felt very sure that Loftus would not have done it; that short-lived youth having been the very essence of selfishness, and debased by a marked inclination towards juvenile profligacy.

"Brothers are not the most self-sacrificing of human beings," he said. "I think you'll find finer instances of devotion in an Irish or a Scottish foster-brother than in the Saxon blood relation. But Madoline is a sister in a thousand. Take care of that willow," as the boat shot under the drooping foliage of an ancient pollard. "How bright and happy she looked last night!"

"Yes; she had just received a long letter from Gerald, and he talks of coming home sooner than she expected him. He will give up his fishing in Norway, though I believe he had engaged an inland sea all to himself, and he will be home before the end of July. Isn't it nice? I am dying with curiosity to see what he is like."

"Didn't I describe him to you?"

"In the vaguest way. You said I was sure to like him. Now I have an invincible conviction that I shall detest him, just because it is my duty to feel a sisterly affection for him."

"Take care that you keep within the line of duty, and that your affection doesn't go beyond the sisterly limit," said Edgar with a grim smile. "There is no fear of the other thing."

"What a savage look!" cried Daphne laughingly. "How horribly jealous you must be of him."

"Hasn't he robbed me of my first love?" demanded Edgar; "and now——"

"Don't be so gloomy. Didn't you tell me you had got over your disappointment, and that you meant to be a dear useful bachelor uncle to Madoline's children by-and-by?"

"I don't know about being always a bachelor," said Edgar doubtfully. "That would imply that I hadn't got over my disappointment."

"That is what you said the other day. I am only quoting yourself against yourself. I like to think of you as a perpetual bachelor for Lina's sake. It is a more poetical idea than the notion of your consoling yourself with somebody else."

"Yet a man does generally console himself. It is in human nature."

"Don't say another word," cried Daphne. "You are positively hateful this morning—so low and material. I'm afraid it must be the consequence of eggs-and-bacon, such a vulgar unæsthetic breakfast—Bink's idea. I shall give you bread-and-butter and strawberries to-morrow; if MacCloskie will let me have any strawberries."

"If you were to talk a little less and row a little more, I think we should get on faster," suggested Edgar, smiling at her.

They had got into a spot where a little green peninsula jutted out into the stream, and where the current was almost a whirlpool. The boat had been travelling in a circle for the last five minutes, while Daphne plied her sculls, unconscious of the fact. They were nearing Stratford; the low level meadows lay round them, the tall spire rose yonder above the many-arched Gothic bridge built by good Sir Hugh Clopton before Shakespeare was born. He must have crossed it many and many a time with the light foot of boyhood, a joyous spirit, finding ineffable delight in simplest things; and again, after he had lived his life and had measured himself amidst the greatest minds of his age, in the greatest city of the world, and had toiled and conquered independence and fame, and came back rich enough to buy the great house hard by the grammar-school, how often must he have lounged against the grey stone parapet, in the calm even-tide, watching the light linger and fade upon the reedy river, bats and swallows skimming across the water, the grand old Gothic church embowered in trees, and the level meadows beyond. They were in the very heart of Shakespeare's country. Yonder far away to their right lay the meadow-

path by which he walked to Shottery. Memories of him were interwoven with every feature in the landscape.

"Papa told me I was not to go beyond our own meadows," said Daphne, "but of course he meant when I was alone. It is quite different when you are with me."

"Naturally. I am capable of taking care of you."

This kind of thing went on for another week of weather which at worst was showery. They breakfasted in the boat-house every morning, Daphne exercising all her ingenuity in the arrangement of the meal, and making rapid strides in the art of cookery. It must be confessed that Mr. Turchill seemed to enjoy the breakfasts suggested by the vulgar-minded Bink, rather more than those which were direct emanations of Daphne's delicate fancy. He liked broiled mackerel better than cream and raspberry jam. He preferred devilled kidneys to honey-comb and milk rolls. But whatever Daphne set before him he eat, with thankfulness. It was so sweet to spend his mornings in this bright joyous company. It was a grand thing to have so intelligent a pupil, for Daphne was becoming very skilful in the management of her boat. She was able to navigate her bark safely through the most difficult bits of the deep swift river. She could shoot the narrow arches of Stratford Bridge in as good style as a professional waterman.

But when two young pure-minded people are enjoying themselves in this frank easy-going fashion, there is generally some one of mature age near at hand to suggest evil, and to put a stop to their enjoyment. So it was in this case. The rector's wife heard of her niece's watery meanderings and gipsy breakfasts, and took upon herself to interfere. Mr. MacCloskie, who had reluctantly furnished a dish of forced strawberries for the boat-house breakfast, happened to stroll over to Arden Rectory in the afternoon with a basket of the same fruit, as an offering, from himself, to Mrs. Ferrers—an inevitable half-crown tip to the head gardener, and dear at the price, in the lady's opinion. Naturally a man of MacCloskie's consequence required refreshment after his walk, so Mrs. Todd entertained him in her snug little sanctum next the pantry, with a dish of strong tea and a crusty knob of home-baked bread, lavishly buttered. Whereupon, in the course of conversation, Mr. MacCloskie let fall that Miss Daphne was carrying on finely with Mr. Turchill, of Hawksyard, and that he

supposed that would be a match some of these days. Pressed for details, he described the early breakfasts at the boat-house, the long mornings spent on the river, the afternoons at billiards, the tea-drinkings in the conservatory. All this Todd, who was an irrepressible gossip, retailed to her mistress next morning, when the bill of fare had been written, and the campaign of gluttony for the next twenty-four hours had been carefully mapped out.

Mrs. Ferrers heard with the air of profound indifference which she always assumed on such occasions.

"MacCloskie is an incorrigible gossip," she said, "and you are almost as bad."

But, directly she had dismissed Todd, the fair Rhoda went up to her dressing-room and arrayed herself for a rural walk. Life in a pastoral district, with a husband of few ideas, will now and then wax monotonous, and Rhoda was glad to have some little mental excitement—something which made it necessary for her to bestir herself, and which enabled her to be useful, after her manner, to her kith and kin.

"I shall not speak to her father, yet," she said to herself. "He has strict ideas of propriety, and might be too severe. Madoline must remonstrate with her."

She walked across the smiling fields, light of foot, buoyed up by the pleasing idea that she was performing a Christian duty, that her errand was in all things befitting her double position as near relation and pastor's wife. She felt that if Fate had made her a man she would have been an excellent bishop. All the sterner duties of that high calling—visitations, remonstrances, suspensions—would have come easy to her.

She found Madoline in the morning-room, the French windows wide open, the balcony full of flowers, the tables and mantel-piece and cabinets all abloom with roses.

"Sorry to interrupt your morning practice, dearest," said Mrs. Ferrers as Madoline rose from the piano. "You play those sweet classic bits so deliciously. Mendelssohn, is it not?"

"No; Raff. How early you are, Aunt Rhoda."

"I have something very particular to say to you, Lina, so I came directly I had done with Todd."

This kind of address from a woman of Rhoda's type generally forbodes unpleasantness. Madoline looked alarmed.

"There's nothing wrong, I hope," she faltered.

"Not absolutely — not intentionally wrong, I trust," said Mrs. Ferrers. "But it must be put a stop to immediately."

Madoline turned pale. In the days that were gone Aunt Rhoda had always been a dreadful nuisance to the servants. She had been perpetually making unpleasant discoveries, peculations, dissipations, and carryings-on of divers kinds. Not unfrequently she had stumbled upon mare's-nests, and after making everybody uncomfortable for a week or two, had been constrained to confess herself mistaken. Her rule at South Hill had not been peace. And now Lina feared that, even outside the house, Aunt Rhoda had contrived to make one of her terrible discoveries. Someone had been giving away the milk, or selling the corn, or stealing garden-stuff.

"What is it, Aunt Rhoda?"

Mrs. Ferrers did not give a direct answer. Her cold grey eyes made the circuit of the room, and then she asked:

"Where is Daphne?"

"In her own room—lying down, I think, tired out with rowing."

"And where is Mr. Turchill?"

"Gone home. He had some important business, I believe—a horse to look at."

"Oh, he does go home, sometimes?"

"How curiously you talk, Aunt Rhoda. Is there any harm in his coming here as often as he likes? He is our oldest friend. Papa treats him like a son."

"Oh, no harm, of course, if Vernon is satisfied. But I don't wonder Daphne is tired, and is lying down at mid-day—a horribly lazy, unladylike habit, by the way. Are you aware that she is down at the boat-house before seven every morning?"

"Certainly, aunt. It is much nicer for her to row at that early hour than later in the day. Edgar is teaching her; she is quite safe in his care."

"And do you know that there is a gipsy breakfast every morning in the boat-house?"

"I have heard something about a tea-kettle, and ham-and-eggs. Daphne has an idea that she is learning to cook."

"And do you approve of all this?"

Madoline smiled at the question.

"I like her to be happy. I think she wastes a good deal of time; that she is doing nothing to carry on her education; but idleness is only natural in a girl of her age, and she has been at home such a short time, and she is so fond of the river."

"Has it never occurred to you, Madoline, that there is some impropriety in these tête-à-tête mornings with Edgar Turchill?"

"Impropriety! Impropriety in Daphne being on friendly terms with Edgar—Edgar, who has been brought up with us almost as a brother!"

"With you, perhaps, not with Daphne. She has spent most of her life away from South Hill. She is little more than a stranger to Mr. Turchill."

"She would be very much surprised if you were to tell her so, and so would Edgar. Why, he used always to make himself her playfellow in her holidays, before she went to Madame Tolmache."

"That was all very well while she was in short frocks. But she is now a woman, and people will talk about her."

"About Daphne, my innocent child-like sister, little more than a child in years, quite a child in gaiety and light-heartedness! How can such an idea enter your head, Aunt Rhoda? Surely the most hardened scandalmonger could not find anything to say against Daphne."

"My dear Madoline," began Mrs. Ferrers severely, "you are usually so sensible in all you do and say that I really wonder at the way you are talking this morning. There are certain rules of conduct, established time out of mind, for well-bred young women; and Daphne can no more violate those rules with impunity than anybody else can. It is not because she wears her hair down her back and her petticoats immodestly scanty that she is to go scot-free," added Aunt Rhoda in a little involuntary burst of malevolence.

She had not been fond of Daphne as a child; she liked her much less as a young woman. To a well-preserved woman of forty, who still affects to be young, there is apt to be something aggravating in the wild freshness and unconscious insolence of lovely seventeen.

"Aunt Rhoda, I think you forget that Daphne is my sister—my very dear sister."

"Your half-sister, Madoline. I forget nothing. It is you who forget that there are reasons in Daphne's antecedents why we should be more especially careful about her."

"It is unkind of you to speak of that, aunt," protested Madoline, blushing. "As to Edgar Turchill, he is my father's favourite companion; he is devoted to all of us. There can be no possible harm in his being a kind of adopted brother to Daphne."

"He was an adopted brother to you

three years ago, and we all know what came of it."

"Pshaw! That was a foolish fancy, and is all over and done with."

"The same thing may happen in Daphne's case."

"If it should, would you be sorry? I am sure I should not. I know papa would approve."

"Oh, if Vernon is satisfied with the state of affairs, I can have nothing further to say," replied Mrs. Ferrers with dignity; "but if Daphne were my daughter—and Heaven forbid I should ever have such a responsibility as an overgrown girl of that temperament!—I would allow no boat-house breakfastings, no meanderings on the Avon. However, it is no business of mine," concluded Mrs. Ferrers with an injured air, having said all she had to say. "How is your water-lily counterpane getting on?"

"Nearly finished," answered Madoline, delighted to change the conversation. "It will be ready for papa's birthday."

"How is my brother, by-the-bye?"

"He has been complaining of rheumatic pains. I'm afraid we shall have to spend next winter abroad."

"What nonsense, Lina. It is mere hypochondria on Vernon's part. He was always full of fancies. He is as well as I am."

"He does not think so himself, aunt; and he ought to know best."

"I am not sure of that. A hypochondriac may fancy he has hydrophobia, but he is not obliged to be right. You foster Vernon's imaginary complaints by pretending to believe in them."

Lina did not argue the point, perceiving very plainly that her aunt was out of temper. Nor did she press that lady to stay to luncheon, nor offer any polite impediment to her departure. But the interference of starched propriety had the usual effect. Lightly as Madoline had seemed to hold her aunt's advice, she was too thorough a woman not to act upon it. She went up to Daphne's room directly Mrs. Ferrers left the house. She stole softly in, so as not to disturb the girl's slumber, and seated herself by the open window calmly to await her waking. Daphne's room was one of the prettiest in the house. It had a wide window, overlooking the pastoral valley and winding Avon. It was neatly furnished with birchwood, and turquoise cretonne, and white and gold crockery, but it was sorely out of

order. Daphne's gowns of yesterday and the day before were flung on the sofa. Daphne's hats of all the week round were strewed on tables and chairs. Her sunshade lay across the dressing-table among the brushes, and pomade-pots, and flower-glasses, and pincushions, and trumpery. She had no maid of her own, and her sister's maid, in whose articles of service it was to attend upon her, had renounced that duty as a task impossible of performance. No well-drilled maid could have anything to do—except when positively obliged—with such an untidy and unpunctual young lady. A young lady who would appoint to have her hair dressed and her gown laced at seven, and come running into the house breathless and panting at twenty minutes to eight; a young lady who made hay of her cuffs and collars, whenever she was in a hurry, and whose drawer of ribbons was always being upheaved as if by an earthquake. Daphne, being remonstrated with and complained of, protested that she would infinitely rather wait upon herself than be worried.

"You are all goodness, Lina, dear, but half a maid is no maid. I would rather do without one altogether," she said.

The room was not absolutely ugly, even in its disorder. All the things that were scattered about were pretty things. There were a good many ornaments, such as are apt to be accumulated by young ladies with plenty of pocket-money, and very little common sense. Mock Venetian-glass flower vases of every shape and colour; Japanese cups and saucers, and fans and screens; Swiss brackets; willow-pattern plates; a jumble of everything trumpery and fashionable; flowers everywhere, and the atmosphere sickly sweet with the odour of tuberose.

Daphne stirred in her sleep, faintly conscious of a new presence in the room, sighed, turned on her pillow, and presently sat up, flushed and towzled, in her indigo gown, just as she had come in from her boating excursion.

"Have you had a nice nap, dear?"

"Lovely. I was awfully tired. We rowed to Stratford Weir."

"And you are quite able to row now?"

"Edgar says I scull as well as he does."

"Then, dearest, I think you ought to dispense with Edgar in future and keep to our own meadows, as papa said he wished you to do."

"Oh!" said Daphne. "Is that a message from papa?"

"No, dear. But I am sure it will be better for you to consider his wishes upon this point. He is very particular about being obeyed."

"Oh! very well, Lina. Of course if you wish it I will tell Edgar the course of lessons is concluded. He has been awfully good. It will be rather slow without him. But I was beginning to find the breakfasts a weight on my mind. It was so difficult to maintain variety—and Bink has such low ideas. Do you know that he actually suggested sausages—pork-sausages in June! And I could not make him comprehend the nauseousness of the notion."

"Then it is understood, darling, that you row by yourself in future. I know papa would prefer it."

"You prefer it, Lina; that is enough for me," answered Daphne in her coaxing way. "But I think I ought to give Edgar some little present for all his goodness to me. A smoking-cap, or a cigar-case, or an anti-macassar for his mother. I could work it in crewels, don't you know?"

"You never finish anything, Daphne."

"Because the beginning is always so much nicer. But if I should break down in this, you would finish it, wouldn't you, Lina?"

"With pleasure, my pet."

Edgar was told that evening that his services as a teacher of rowing would no longer be required. And though the fact was imparted to him with infinite sweetness, he felt as if half the sunshine were taken out of his life.

A TRAVELLER'S TALES.

A STOOL.

I OBSERVE that when young ladies deign to accompany papa on a visit to my bachelor abode, they specially affect a certain stool beside my drawing-room fire. Old ladies seldom look at it; men lay their feet on it without a glance, scarcely exclaiming, after a long séance, "What a queer seat! Where did not pick it up?" But girls instinctively appropriate my stool, and in the hollow of its upturned wings they settle themselves cosily. Then they exclaim to papa that he must get a thing like it, and ask where such a funny, dear, delightful object is to be procured. When I tell them it was made in Coomassie, they look blank. To remind them of the Ashanti War confuses but does not enlighten. Most of us who went through that campaign are not yet used to regard ourselves as old.

But, my bachelor friends of that period—so many, yet so reduced!—the pretty girls of this year of grace have forgotten your prowess, your hardships, your perilous adventures. Other heroes they have now, not bodiless imaginings begotten out of fancy by the special correspondent's pen, but real live gallants, fresh from Zululand or Afghanistan, who tell their own experiences *viva voce*, if they find no subject more absorbing. Ulundi and Rorke's Drift, Jellalabad, the Peiwar, and Khelat-i-Ghilzai, these are words known by heart, whilst Amoaful and Coomassie recall but a vague tradition.

My stool rests upon a square flat base, whence rises a hollow column, perforated à jour, to support the top. This is eighteen inches long by ten inches broad, ornamented with holes neatly cut, and curved upwards at each end like a bow. It is all one solid piece of cotton-wood, that stately tree found in the tropics of both hemispheres. The timber is too soft for our purposes, but this very quality adapts it to the use of the patient but unlaborious negro. With such implements as his, a lifetime might be spent in shaping and carving a block like this of any harder wood, and it might probably split when finished. The *ceiba* cuts much more easily than deal, and has an exquisite whiteness. It will last, if kept within doors, from generation to generation, its pristine spotlessness maintained by scraping the surface with rough leaves; but the sun has a disastrous effect. The Ashanti has but one model for shape, though his varieties of decoration are many. Those who have seen the pretty stool which Sir Garnet presented to the Princess of Wales can exactly picture mine, save the graceful carving and the repoussé work in silver. That is to say, my trophy once resembled that historic article. It is some generations since, however, for the surface is yellow and almost polished, and the symmetrical perforations have been knocked one into another. At some distant time a corner has been split off, and re-joined by stitches of copper wire. I would not have it supposed that my stool is other than a handsome piece of furniture, but by comparison it is very dilapidated. How it chanced that I brought such an ancient relic from Coomassie, when there were hundreds new and beautiful about the place, is just the legend I am going to set down.

On the night of the capture I dined with the little mess of gunners. We were five, I think—Captain Kaite, Lieutenants

Saunders, Knox, and Palmer, and myself, in a small hovel off the market-place. Our equipage was of the simplest and the roughest; our fare Australian beef, shredded out and mixed with rice. During the brief meal the head-executioner of Ashanti paid us a visit, and immediately afterwards a summons came to aid in protecting the place against our camp-followers. It was busy in the streets that night. Barricades had been erected at the chief openings of the town, and their defenders slept heavily beneath them. At every turning blazed an enormous fire, the biggest of all before the general's quarters; it lit the open alcove of the building where Sir Garnet and his staff wrote, smoked, dictated, gave orders, and drank tea in public sight above the throng. Soldiers, hurriedly re-equipped, pressed towards the burning quarter, whence rolled dense clouds of smoke and sheets of flame across the inky sky. The glare shone through and through my tent; the tramp of patrols going out; the fierce discontent of those wearily returning; the complaint of plunderers dragged to justice; and, above all, the wailings of a policeman sentenced to be hung, distracted me for awhile. But one sleeps sound after a victory.

I had engaged myself overnight to accompany Saunders in a thorough exploration of the town. After coffee at daybreak, we visited the aristocratic quarter destroyed by our Kroomen and camp-followers the night before. Many curious and valuable things remained in that labyrinth of neat huts and small court-yards leading one into another. The heavy-thatched roofs which made such a blaze had mostly fallen without grave damage to the buildings. Thence we entered the palace, and surveyed that extraordinary show of barbaric wealth and barbarous cruelty. Enough has been said of its contents, from the renowned umbrella and the golden pipes to the range of stools coated an inch thick with human blood as with glue. But to the last day of my existence I shall regret those tables of carved ebony, one adorned with plaques of gold, one with alternate plaques of gold and silver. I had carriers returning empty-handed who might have borne them away with a quantity of treasures which were blown up and burnt.

Two hours in the palace carried us to breakfast-time and duty. In the afternoon we strolled another way, beyond the inner line of pickets. Here also the streets were broad and smooth, lined with houses much

bigger, and, in many cases, even more elaborate of decoration on the outside. One after another we entered them, traversed their empty courts, and examined their forsaken chambers. In this quarter, scarcely touched by plunderers, everything remained as the owner had left it on his hasty flight. Cloths and silks lay on the floor, arms and skins hung upon the walls, sacks of clothing, brass lamps and basins, chairs, beads, and ornaments were strewn around. Often were we tempted by some quaint and interesting object, and the struggle of resistance forbade us to show mercy when we caught two Fantees looting. These scoundrels had chosen a house very large and highly ornamental; its outer wall bore the representation of a battle in stucco, highly polished, and stained with Venetian red. They knew the likely hiding-places, which we did not; and a curious assortment of valuables they had brought together. A large bag was filled with native silks, worth, as it afterwards proved, some sixty pounds at the coast. Upon the floor lay sandals, adorned with little lumps of gold, weighing, probably, an ounce apiece. A Brummagem musket was cased in silver, and a pouch-belt of leopard-skin, fitted with silver-handled knives, priming-flask, and fetish-bag, lay beside it. But the article of loot which dwells especially in my recollection was a pile of stools, all snowy white and beautifully carved. They were five or six in number, and the two lowest, which had silver mountings, were nearly as handsome as that given to the Princess of Wales. Whether they had been so arranged by the owner, or by the Fantee plunderers, we did not ascertain. Leaving all this wealth, we led our prisoners to the provost-marshal, whose dealings with them I never learned.

In the night my tent was flooded by a deluge of rain, and I crept miserably into a hammock, whence nothing could stir me till the last instant. By seven o'clock the main body of our troops had started on its homeward march, and the rear-guard stood waiting for the destruction of the palace. I resolved to bring away one silver stool at least for a trophy, and ran towards the house mentioned, Yarbro, my head servant, after me. The Kroomen stood at every corner, with torch in one hand, matches in the other. A superior officer called after me as I passed, and reluctantly I commissioned my stupid "boy" to find and bring in the loot. Yarbro seemed to com-

prehend, and set off at score, for the distance was not trifling. In a quarter of an hour he returned, with one handsome white stool, not silver-bound, and the ancient piece of furniture I have described. In great anger and disappointment I flung the things at him. But a dull boom, a rush of smoke above the trees, told us that the palace was destroyed. "Fall in, there! Fall in!" officers cried. Gleeful at a chance of mischief, the Kroomen lit their torches, and rushed up the street, firing the thatch wherever it was dry. I picked up my stools and threw them into a hammock.

At the first camp I asked Yarbro why he had not brought me a silver-mounted stool, and why he had mocked me with such a rubbishy old thing as that I sat on. He replied, first, that he had found no silver-mounted article; and second, that he thought the rubbishy old thing was what I wanted.

"Why—why—why?" I cried with increasing rage. But Yarbro's English, not strong at any time, vanished before a sign of anger. His eyes rolled timorously, and words came without connection. I made out that the stool was a great fetish, worth incalculable amounts in luck, if not redeemable for money. Nothing further could be gathered, and I dismissed him with resignation.

At Cape Coast Castle he entered my bedroom one morning, and hung about as a man does who wants to talk. On my questioning him, he answered: "Ashanti man come. He want trade, sir." I was pleased to hear this, for nobody had expected that the beaten enemy would so soon recover from his sulks. But the matter did not interest one who is not so fortunate as to be connected with any kind of trade. I said as much, and left Yarbro to his household duties. At her appearance in the breakfast-room, my kind hostess eagerly addressed me:

"Did you understand what Yarbro meant, Mr. B——? He says that two Ashantis brought a quantity of gold-dust to exchange for your old stool, and that you refused their offer."

"Gold-dust for my old stool? Oh, this deception is worse than the first! Pray send for him."

Yarbro came, and volubly declared in Fantee that such and no other was the message he had given me. It was no time to correct misunderstandings. "Fly!" I cried. "Catch them Ashanti one time!"

But he was too late. The messengers had gone back disappointed, fearful to linger amongst that hostile population. Very mad I was when all hope vanished, but I could scarcely blame Yarbrow. He, it appears, recognised the house to which I sent him, perceived the grand fetish in a corner, and doubted not that I wished to have it. The visit of the Ashantis did not surprise him, nor did my refusal. The omniscient white man doubtless understood what he was doing, and scorned to exchange his luck for money.

When all hope of catching the delegates was lost, I asked Mrs. — what the incident signified. "That I cannot tell exactly," she replied. "Your stool belonged to Quoi Afrim, the favourite general of Sai Tooti, who founded the Ashanti kingdom."

"Ah, the venerable object does not look as if it was made yesterday! And what did Quoi Afrim do with it?"

"There you ask too much of my folklore. His name is familiar on the coast, and I have heard it since I was a child. We will ask Yarbrow if you like."

I said, "By all means!" and my luckless follower arrived. Standing before us in the verandah, he told his legend, and the lady translated it with spirit. Of course, the Fantee had no dates, and very little geography. I could correct him at the time, but my African learning is all forgotten, nor have I books for reference. So far as memory serves, the events narrated took place about 1720 A.D., in the country of the Akims. But I guarantee no more than the simplest facts.

The Ashantis were slaves of Deukera, a kingdom which they have reduced to a geographical expression. So utterly oppressed and broken were they, that the brutal monarch exercised on them his maddest freaks of tyranny such as he did not dare impose on other tributaries. As I understand it, the Ashantis had never been independent at this time, and they were scarcely a nation. Sai Tooti, the destined hero, was son of an evil-minded caboceer, who in a small way retaliated on his people the miseries and insults he himself suffered from the men of Deukera. Father and son did not agree at all. Sai Tooti employed himself in hunting with his friend Quoi Afrim, the heir of a chieftain who lived near by. In his house Sai Tooti passed the time not occupied in the jungle, saving a rare visit to his mother, for whom he had a passionate affection. Quoi Afrim

had a sister, with whom his friend naturally fell in love. I do not know whether the feeling was mutual, or whether it was even declared. But one day the wicked caboceer perceived that he had room for another wife, and he cast his eyes upon this girl, unknowing, one may believe, that his son fancied her. The young men came from hunting to find the marriage festivities in progress. It was too late to interfere, if interference would have availed, and they fled with their sorrow to the woods. Some months afterwards the Gesler of Deukera imagined that crowning atrocity which cost him his life, gave his kingdom to Sai Tooti, and launched the Ashanti people on that career which we stopped for awhile, but did not block. He ordered that every caboceer should surrender his first wife to soldiers despatched for the collection of this new tribute. The affection of mother and son is always powerful with negroes, and I have mentioned that Sai Tooti had an extreme tenderness for his parent. He heard the news in the bush, and hastened home, not yet with any thoughts of a resistance, which seemed hopeless, but resolved to save his mother by stratagem. The only chance of escape lay in persuading the caboceer to sacrifice his new bride, and this was but one degree less cruel to the lover's feelings. But the uxorious old man refused, and whilst the argument was warmest the soldiers of Deukera arrived. They numbered six, and their conduct probably was offensive. Father and son had already come almost to blows, when the wailing of women in the court roused Sai Tooti to ungovernable passion. He rushed out, followed by his friend, and attacked the Deukerans. The old caboceer and others took their part, whilst a number of villagers joined their assailants. In the end the soldiers were all slain, and the chief among them; but the founder of Coomassie was never charged with parricide.

This incident caused the rising of the Ashantis, wherein Sai Tooti naturally took the lead. Deukera was overthrown and enslaved. It rose to semi-independence afterwards, till the finding of that grand nugget, which Lord Gifford so narrowly missed taking caused its annihilation—for the king would not give it up, nor could keep it, and so he was swept away.

There is no doubt that Sai Tooti, like the Zulu Chaka, was a master-man. He transformed the people of serfs, whose name was a by-word for cowardice and degradation; led them, unused to arms and

the practice of war, from victory to victory; and before his thirtieth birthday had established an empire that stretched from the Kong Mountains to the Prah, and from Dahomey to Mandingo land.

Touching the fate of his early love, history is silent, but Quoi Afrim was his sovereign's right hand. After years of fighting, always victorious, defeat came, and death with it. The Ashanti monarch invaded Akim, fought a successful battle, and received submission from the chiefs. They bound themselves by the most solemn oaths to be his liegemen, to serve him in war, and to pay tribute. Sai Tooti, who was ill, accepted these terms, and, after a time, went forward to new conquests. But the treacherous Akims perceived that the victor, over confident, travelled an hour's march behind the army, with an escort of two thousand men. The booty to be gained was enormous, the risk of failure slight. It might reasonably be expected that an empire so hastily created and so incongruous would drop to pieces at the overthrow of its founder. The Akims resolved to hazard a bold stroke, and they assembled secretly in the woods behind the ford of Cormantin—a spot unvisited as yet by Europeans, but not to be confused with the town of that name on the sea-shore. It lies upon the Bossum Prah. Everything went as the conspirators desired. The main army crossed without suspicion, and after a while the body-guard came up. There was as many slaves as fighting-men in that gorgeous retinue. Sai Tooti himself, with a hundred women, travelled in silken litters plated with gold. Every great caboceer had his harem. The advance-guard crossed the river, and then, at a signal given, the Akim chiefs in attendance suddenly escaped. Forthwith, an overpowering number of the enemy attacked the long line in silence. From either side they rushed, sprang out of holes, dropped from the trees. Skilled marksmen transfixed the horn-blowers, and snatched away the instrument which might have given an alarm. The vanguard re-plunged into the stream, but never gained the hither bank. Those in rear, dashing forward to protect their king, entangled themselves amongst screaming women, litters overturned, and slaves escaping. But a circle formed about the monarch, and here the fight was desperate as hopeless. Quoi Afrim saw that all was lost unless help came. His sons were the fleetest of the army, and they

stood beside him. At a word the three youths fought their passage through the struggling crowd and fell upon the enemy. Two gained the bank; one only climbed the other slope, with the Akims behind him. While the devoted guard fought breast to breast with the enemy, this boy ran for his king's life and his father's. Wounded, fainting, he sped through the trees. At length a little group of stragglers appeared ahead, and then only did he raise his voice. "Turn, men of Ashanti! Your king is waylaid!" They ran back, and he flew on. The footsore and the sick regained their strength, and as they turned the cry rang forward: "Our king is waylaid! Help!" From mouth to mouth it passed like the wind. The track filled with soldiers hurrying madly to the rescue. Shouting his desperate news, the youth struggled through them, until he saw the umbrellas of the chiefs commanding the vanguard borne towards him. Then he knew the alarm was given and set off back. The host returned in one solid body, without order or array. It surged along the path, burst through the river lined with foes, and cut a passage to the fatal spot. The foremost saw Quoi Afrim still upright, surrounded by a crowd of enemies. Whilst they looked, he fell upon the body of his dead master, saved at least from insult. The son bent over him. "If you die," he cried, "your stool shall be yearly washed in the blood of a hundred Akim slaves for ever!"—as is the custom.

The hero whispered: "Not mine! Give all to the king!" and so died. Thus it happens that Quoi Afrim's stool was not plastered with the blood of generations, like those others which we saw in Coomassie.

The fight was long and desperate. In the end the Akims retired with vast plunder, and the Ashantis withdrew to their own country. The flower of the nobility had perished. But the spirit of Sai Tooti survived, and the massacre of that day was awfully avenged. It has not been forgotten, however. Meminda Cormantin, Cormantin Saturday, is still the strongest and most fatal oath by which an Ashanti swears. If a man broke that the earth would quake. When the slave or the prisoner is seized, and the knife is at his throat, if he can but shriek those syllables, he is preserved. For this reason it is that the Ashanti's first action is to thrust a knife through the victim's jaws, paralysing or transfixing his tongue.

That is the legend attached to my stool. I presented the white and handsome one to the Mayor of Liverpool for his renowned collection.

MY LITTLE TOUR IN WALES.

PART IV.

"THANK you. I never drink beer." Why of course not. Who but Mr. Edward Emilius Smith would ever think of associating two such incongruous ideas as beer and Adolphus Styffecote?

But Mr. Smith is quite unabashed. He has discovered at a little public-house just opposite the end of the bridge, what he calls a wonderful tap of home-brewed, and is as proud of his discovery as if it were a continent or a comet at the very least. He waxes, indeed, so eloquent about its merits, that I sarcastically suggest his remaining at Llangollen and devoting himself to their yet further appreciation.

For we are on the move. Adolphus and the Tattenhams—the old birds, that is—are to go on to Corwen by train and see about rooms, whilst the rest of the party, with the exception of Woffles, who is accommodated with a donkey, walk. We are already on the road when the audacious proposition is made, and the two gentlemen are escorting us for the first mile or so of the way, purposing to return to their own breakfast when they have seen us safely beyond the town. Fancy Adolphus drinking beer before breakfast in the bar of a country public-house!

Really, when one comes to think of it, it was quite time to adopt some more rational course of procedure than has characterised our goings on for the last few days. The amount of nonsense that has been talked, the monstrous twists that have been given to time-honoured traditions and inscriptions, the outrages that have been committed on all historical and poetical and legendary propriety, have been enough to make Cnoillaine, and Brorhmail Ysgythog, and Hywel ap Eiwion Lygliw, and Madog ap Gruffydd Maelw, turn in their graves. We proceed sensibly to-day, and set a good example to Edith, to say nothing of that long-legged slip of a Tattenham girl, with whom she has sworn the eternal friendship of the schoolroom.

Not that they benefit by it in the smallest degree. I don't know that there is any very remarkable echo anywhere along the road between Llangollen and Corwen, but, if there be, there will certainly be as

little fear of passing it by unrecognised with those two in company, as there is hope of hearing it repeat anything worth hearing. Whether they or Woffles or Mr. Smith are the wildest or the most uproarious, or get through the largest amount of nonsense, or perform the most absurd vagaries in the course of the day, I am not a sufficient expert in lunacy to determine. But Emma and I walk soberly, as reasonable people should do, taking an intelligent interest in the beautiful scenery and the various points of interest that open one after the other; as we now ascend a steep reach of hill commanding the whole stretch of the lovely valley once the property of the great Owen Glendower, or Owain Glyndwr as our little guide-book piques itself on correctly misspelling him; now dip down again almost to the brink of the dashing Dee, with just a peep of the rushing clear brown stream flinging up its jets of foam between the dipping boughs and over the glistening green and golden leaves; whilst away in the distance the great range of the Berwyn Hills rise, now clear and bare and rugged, now draped in floating mist-wreaths, now shimmering softly in the blue transparent haze of the hot bright noon.

I think the distance must be wrongly stated in our little guide-book—at least, the five miles allotted to the road from Llangollen to Glyndyfrdwy certainly appear much longer than any ordinary measurement. Mr. Smith suggests that the fatigue I experience arises not from my exertions in reaching the place, but from my heroic but entirely unsuccessful efforts at pronouncing it. But that is simply an impertinence to which, however Emma may think it polite to force a laugh in reply, I do not condescend to pay the smallest attention; and after a short rest and a glass of milk—not goat's milk, as we have been fondly hoping, but unromantic extract of the common cow of every-day life—we set forth upon our march again, Mr. Smith diversifying the procedure by jumping leap-frogwise on to the crupper of Woffles's donkey, where he challenges Edith and her ally to a race to the next milestone, and disappears in a whirlwind of kicks, plunges, dust, and laughter, to be seen no more till we find him a couple of hours later with a carrot in one hand and an apple in the other, earnestly endeavouring to beguile his four-legged brother into the front-door of the hotel.

Meanwhile Emma and I plod sturdily

and sensibly on, past the clump of firs that marks the watch-tower of that vanished residence of the great Glyndwr, which according, as our guide-book informs us, to the poet Islw Coch—whoever he may have been—was equal in extent to Westminster Abbey; past the little village of Llansaintffraid, head-quarters of the pleasant stretch of clear brown stream with “here and there a lusty trout, and here and there a grayling;” past the Carchar Owain Glyndwr, or “Owen Glendower’s prison” (with regard to which, after much study of my local guide-book, and a long exhaustive explanation in an altogether unknown tongue from an ancient dame in marvellous black straw hat, tied down over a voluminous white nightcap, I confess to not having even now the faintest idea whether it was the place where the great Owen was locked up himself or that in which he locked up other people). And so at last to Corwen, where, as I have said, we find Mr. Edward Emilius Smith. The rest of the party have gone on, for it seems that the hotel is full, and our party have to be distributed among various neat little stone-built cottages, in the clean and lavender-smelling best bed-room of one of which I presently find myself installed, not at all sorry for a rest after a tramp which our guide-book persists in setting down as ten miles, but which I am quite certain, lovely and instructive as it has been, cannot have been less than fifteen at the very shortest.

It is not till I have taken off my boots, and am startled by finding my feet upon what is certainly not an ordinary bed-room carpet, that I discover what it is about my new apartment which has half-unconsciously struck me with a vague sense of oddity. Then it suddenly dawns upon me that never before have I seen a room so thoroughly swaddled up. The pleasant little surprise for my bare soles has been prepared by stretching over the trimly-swept but venerable carpet long strips of equally trim and equally venerable oil-cloth, “the united ages” of the two, as they say in the newspaper accounts of pauper feasts and posterous marriages, being, I should think, at least half a century. The bed has the usual allowance of blankets and counterpane, but it is covered by a faded patchwork quilt of yet more venerable date. The frame of the little chimney-glass in which I catch, in the intervals between blue vases and green shepherdesses, playfully distorted glimpses of an unknown countenance with a complexion happily

balanced between the two, is carefully swathed in yellow muslin. The narrow wooden frames of the Woodman and his Dog and the Cotter’s Saturday Night have each their casing of elaborately-cut brown tissue paper. The spindly old washhand-stand, from which the vigorous use of the diurnal scrubbing-brush has long since removed every vestige of paint, is oil-clothed like the carpet. But the great feature of the room is its antimacassars. They are upon chair and upon bed-post, upon toilette-table and window-sill, upon the back of the bath and the front of the mantel-piece. The bell-rope had a tassel once, no doubt, possibly a handsome one. It is gone; but the diminutive antimacassar which once shrouded it is still in its place, coming off in your hands at your first attempt to ring the bell. The very pincushion, besides its own clear muslin cover elaborately brodered with the name of Maryanne, is yet further protected by a sampler neatly worked in green silk upon an open ground with the following no doubt moral, but certainly mysterious motto:

LOST,

Between the hours of sunrise and sunset,

Two Golden Hours.

Each set with sixty diamond minutes.

No reward is offered, as they are

Lost for ever.

I never did work a sampler myself, but I should think that two hours, golden or otherwise, must have been about the time that this ingenious piece of needlework must have taken in the execution.

Is Corwen rather a dull little place? Sir Theophilus, who was here a dozen years or so back, has a lively remembrance of it as the starting point of one of the smartest four-horse coaches at that time extant in the three kingdoms, running through the very cream and pink of North Welsh scenery, by way of Cerrigy Druidion, up over the wild upland of Pentre Voelas, then deep down into the narrow glen, where Bettws y Coed snuggles in among the big trees and the thick green bushes that throw their cool shade over the clear brown ripples of the young Conway, as it sweeps on to Danrwst, and Llandudno and the sea; and then up again over such a road as is not often to be found even in wealthy England, a road on any dozen feet of which, could you only cut the section out and lay it deftly on four even legs, instead of planting it against a steep hill-side, you might make cannons and hazards and spot-strokes with as much certainty as on the finest slate-bed

billiard-table ever had; up over Capel Curig and down again through the wild rocky gap of Llanberis Pass. But while the pleasant old stage-coach has been taking a new lease of life on the Sassenach side of the Dee, up here at the foot of the romantic Berwyns and under the very shadow of Moel Liabod and old Father Snowdon himself, the last of the coaches has run itself fairly off the road, and the merry sound of the horn is heard only in announcement of the weary wagonette, with its solitary pair of off-duty postmen, which once a week wends its melancholy way to the half-way house at Bettws y Coed, and forthwith loses heart and wends its melancholy way back again. To-morrow happens to be Tuesday, the day of the hebdomadal excursion, and we hold a family council over the great question, to go or not to go. Deciding promptly that if we want to sit in two long rows, knocking each other's knees and staring into each other's faces, it will be at once easier and less expensive to cashier the dining-table and push the chairs together in the saloon. To say nothing of the consciences of Emma and Adolphus, who have each for the last dozen years subscribed their annual guinea to that admirable society in Jermyn Street, which was hardly on the whole, perhaps, originated for the encouragement in mountainous districts of large excursion parties in pair-horse wagonettes.

So we—that is to say, Emma and I—spend a quiet day with our sketch-books in a shady little nook by the brown Alwen, which here, after its headlong rush down the steep above Pentre Voelas, seems trying to collect itself a little, and assume a tardy dignity before joining its feudal chief, the Dee. George has got his “trout ticket,” and is up to his knees in the stream, fully determined on landing such a basket as shall leave a handsome profit on the investment, and floundering every now and then into a pool after a manner which elicits from poor Emma a little shriek of dismay, and must, I should think, considerably distract the attention of the speckled gentlemen of whom he is in pursuit from the study of the red spinners, and whirling blues, and ants of a fair proportion of the colours of the rainbow, with which he replenishes his line every time a fresh cast of hooks is left dangling among the branches overhead. Adolphus and Sir Theophilus have taken time by the forelock, and are arranging at Bala for our reception to-morrow, returning in due time for table-d’hôte. As for the girls and Mr. Edward

Emilius Smith, they are off, of course, upon some wild scramble among the hills, and if Woffles and her donkey, who at Mr. Smith's earnest entreaty have been allowed to accompany them, ever come back in a distinguishable condition—— But Emma's nerves are delicate, and George's aquatic vagaries are quite sufficient trial to them for the time.

And by-and-by Woffles and her escort do appear. At least, I suppose this little imp with the purple-stained face and hands and the fragmentary frock, and the once natty black boots and speckless socks now modulated into a green and yellow arrangement in clay and duck-weed, is, if not Woffles herself, very much like what Woffles might be expected to become under present auspices. The hat, at all events, is Woffles's hat, though at present its normal position is usurped by a fantastic wreath of woodbine and belladonna, whilst the hat itself hangs rakishly over one eye of the philosophic donkey. And the attendants march beside singing melodiously, and——

And before we have recovered sufficient breath to express our sense of these insane proceedings—Whoosh!—a gliding monster eight feet high comes whirling past within an inch of my elbow, and my little shriek of terror is answered by a chuckle of satisfaction at the “scare” to which I have been a victim, and the next moment a huge wheel rolls pensively into the ditch, and that unquenchable young civil-engineer is bringing one of the Wolverhampton gentlemen, by what he eloquently terms the scruff of his neck, to apologise abjectly for his misdeeds.

So fate and Mr. Edward Emilius have it their own way, and when on our arrival next morning at the Bala station, that irrepressible young gentleman produces the new little local guide, of which by some mysterious means he has already possessed himself, and solemnly impresses upon us the necessity of taking its advice and at once proceeding to investigate the magnificent view to be obtained from the wooden bridge across the railway, poor Emma is left once more to matronise with Lady Tattenham in the little hotel omnibus, and I abandon all claim to be regarded as a rational being for the remainder at all events of my little tour in Wales.

Less than five minutes takes us to the goal of our present ambition, and the first conclusion to which its achievement conducts us is that the editor of our new local guide-book is a wag. The view is a fine

view, no doubt, quite as fine as we could have obtained by remaining quietly on the platform of the station. We see the lake, and the town, which no doubt "from the number of spires visible might be mistaken for a cathedral city" quite as easily as any other town which is obviously without a cathedral. And we see that somewhat oddly assorted collection of "most prominent features in the landscape," the Calvinistic Methodist College, and the residence of R. J. Ll. Price, Esq., and the Arenig Mountains. And then we refer once more to the pages of our monitor, who goes on dryly to observe that, "by the time the visitor will have been satisfied, the omnibuses will have left the station." Wherein our monitor is perfectly correct. It has not taken many minutes to satisfy us that the view of the Calvinistic Methodist College, and the residence of R. J. Ll. Price, Esq., and the Arenig Mountains may be seen to quite as good advantage from the summit of the 'bus as from the summit of the bridge. But our monitor's little practical jest has met with the most complete success. The omnibuses are gone. So we take his advice once more and toddle after them.

And a very pleasant fortnight we have at Bala, and very thoroughly do we "do," after our harum-scarum, irresponsible fashion, the numerous quaint and interesting and picturesque beauties of this lovely little lake and pleasant district round about. Now we munch our sandwiches under the shadow of the rugged heights that frown down upon the deep translucent waters of Llyn Arenig. Now we make a melting pilgrimage to the floating island of Llyn Mynyllod, traditionally gifted with the power of predicting by its various changes of position the coming changes of "the market." Next day we are examining with more than Trojan interest the famous wooden charger of Llandderfel, whereon, as tradition hath it, when Gaffer Will was too severely disciplined by Gammer Ali, some faithful bachelor friend of hen-pecked William would ride from public to public throughout the village, reciting at each some such awesome "rhigwm" as this :

GOFYNIAD.—Am bwy'r wyt ti'n marchogaeth.

ATEB.—Am ddeuddyn o'r gym'dogaeth.

GOFYNIAD.—Pwy yw rheiny Gymro?

ATEB.—Will ac Ali Beuno.

GOFYNIAD.—Ydyw Ali'n curo'n arw?

ATEB.—Mae hi bron a'i ladd e'n farw

Rhwng y ferch a hithau

Mae'i gwr yn las o'i gleisiau.

Which being freely translated runneth roughly thus :

QUESTION.—For whom pray do you ride?

ANSWER.—For two of our country-side.

QUESTION.—And who may these good Cymry be?

ANSWER.—William and Ali Brown d'ye see.

QUESTION.—Does Ali thump her husband, truly?

ANSWER.—Almost to death. They use him cruelly,
She and her daughter. Between the two
Poor William's skin's all black and blue.

This peace-making charger used to be kept in the church, so his parade would seem to have been in some sort a religious function.

Then we return to the lakes again. There is a perfect family of them around here; none of them particularly big; some what we in unromantic England should be apt to call ponds; but each with its own special characteristic, and all with quite enough of beauty to form a very sufficient objective for a day's holiday-making. Llyn Creini we do not trouble. It is a favourite place for perch, our local monitor tells us; but then so are Llyn Arenig, Llyn Celyn, and the great Llyn Tegid or Lake of Bala itself. Indeed, our local monitor seems to have perch upon the brain, even urging their pursuit upon the unpiscatorially disposed traveller, by assuring him that "minnows are considered the best bait for perch—they are not hard to catch." Though whether, as Mr. Edward Emilius observes, the promised facility extends to the captivation of the perch itself, or only to the preliminary annexation of the minnow, is not quite so clear as an ardent thirster after perch might perhaps desire. It may be a defect in our education, but we do not personally care about perch, and as the scenery about Llyn Creini must be very much like that round Llyn Mynyllod, about a couple of "crow" miles off, we determine to shirk that portion of a conscientious tourist's duty, and make our next excursion among the wild rocks and purple and crimson heather of Llyn Arenig Bach.

Something like an excursion this, eight good miles there, and another eight—Mr. Edward Emilius insists upon it that it is the same eight, but that is pure perverseness and impertinence—another eight back. And if they are not exactly mountain miles, there is quite enough of what our civil-engineer professionally styles gradient about them, to give one a very good idea next morning of how many ankles go to make a pair. So we take an off day in Fachddeiliog Wood, and potter about under great spreading trees, and among brilliant moss-covered rocks, and by tiny pools and baby streamlets, clear and cool and sweet, and altogether laugh to scorn our local monitor's assurance of the ample repayment afforded by the view from the

summit of Fachddeiliog Hill, or any other hill, "for the trouble of ascending it." Edith and Jenny Tattenham are quite ready for the climb, of course; and George—who has laid in a fresh stock of flies to replace those left on the branches along the banks of the Alwel at Corwen, and is off to the hills on the strength of some specially "straight tip" touching a certain lake, where the trout swim about ready broiled with hooks in their mouths, crying "Come, catch me"—openly declares that if I'm going to cave in after that little spell he does not think much of my form. By which George doesn't mean my figure, but my powers of pedestrianism. I do not feel a bit ashamed of myself, however, for Edward Emilius is just as tired as I am, and after such a day's work as yesterday, a quiet morning in the woods is really delightful. At least, I find it so.

And so by the next morning we are in train for the ascent of Arenig, a real mountain two thousand eight hundred feet high, and with rocks and precipices not quite, perhaps, upon the orthodox Alpine scale, but big and wild enough for our unsophisticated appreciation. Edward Emilius, who knows Switzerland, as he says, by heart, and talks familiarly—though that, by the way, is not saying much, for I am afraid Edward Emilius would talk familiarly of the ghosts of his ancestors—of Grimsel, and Görnérgrat, and Scheideck, the very names of which convey to homekeeping folk like me a reverential sense of travel and adventure, stoutly maintains that in some respects our little pocket edition of a mountain district has what he calls a decided pull, and that such purples and greys as steep the sunken glens, such soft pinks and melting crimsons as steal slowly over the heathery summits, are not to be had in that drier, rarer, more vivid atmosphere.

And certainly a lovelier view than that from Arenig, as the sunlight glitters upon the fifteen tiny lakes nestled here and there among the surrounding hills, and tracks with threads of silver the winding course of Dee and Tryweryn, Hirnant and Alwel, Lliw and Llafor, and lights up into burning crimson the glowing masses of heather on the nearer summits, cooling down gradually range by range to the soft air-tints of the distant hills by Snowdon, or Aran, or Cader Idris, I at least shall be pleasantly disappointed to find even under the shadow of the queenly Jungfrau or the mighty Mont Blanc. As for crevasses and precipices, arêtes and walls of ice, and all

that sort of thing, if you really want to break your neck you can do it as well down a couple of hundred feet as down a couple of thousand, and with infinitely less trouble and expense.

And so we work our way by mountain and lake, and church and camp—there are two "ancient encampments" within easy picnic distance, as well as two tumuli, full, no doubt, of the bones of equally ancient Britons, and one of them glorified for ever by Spenser as the residence of old Timon, tutor and foster-father of Arthur—till the orthodox Bala programme has been conscientiously gone through, and our last day by Llyn Tegid is set down for a sailing trip on the lake itself.

And a pleasant, lazy, lounging day we make of it. According to our local monitor there is a gold mine at Llannuwchlllyn, with a regular quartz-crushing apparatus, worked by a wondrous wheel, fifty feet high, and yielding half a pound of gold to every ton. But we are idly disposed this morning, without a morsel of enterprise among us, and much more disposed to profit at second-hand by Edward Emilius's graphic stories of the real gold diggings of California, whither it appears he accompanied his father, the great Sir Emilius, a couple of years ago, on one of that cosmopolitan gentleman's little prospecting excursions, than to investigate the mysteries of pay-dirt and panning-out and pile-making for ourselves. So Castell Carn Dorchan is voted "altogether out of it," and Cutthroat Canon, and the Great Gooseflesh Gulch, and the Red Noses' Raid on Phil Arrah-baisy-now's Ranch, are the order of the day.

Very wonderful stories they are, and wonderfully well does Mr. Edward Emilius tell them. With an air of conviction too, which, but for the remembrance of Dinas Bran, might almost lead one to accept them as true. And he adapts them so neatly to present surroundings. Just such another lake as this it was, only, perhaps, eight or ten miles long instead of four, by which they and Mr. Joshua G. Grippus, and the One-eyed Ranchero, Juarez, were camped that night when the two bears came down, as it might be, from the hill over Llangower yonder, and stamped all the cattle just as they were within a day's journey of the great Rat River Reef, for the first claims on which they and Phil the Scalper and his crowd had been racing against each other night and day ever since Go-Bang, the pigeon-toed Celestial, let out the secret in his cups at the station on the

Stony Sierra, where Sir Emilius was triangulating for his new Pacific Junction Railway. That white house with the big wall round it and the big trees beyond was the very image, if you took off the upper storey and just altered the roof and windows a bit, you know, of the ranch on the San José, where they found the proprietor with his ears nailed to his own door-post, and a couple of dozen Indian arrows sticking out of him, like St. Sebastian in a picture-gallery. That big fellow yonder — Yr Arran, is it? — stands just like Four-finger Peak, where the party of Flatfeet, that had been stalking us, as we afterwards found, for a fortnight or more, came sneaking round as it might be over the ridge yonder, and — And so forth, and so forth, each story deftly linked on to some feature of the scenery around us, and each more startling, or awful, or ludicrous than the other.

All which to hear does Desdemona, as represented by Emma, and Adolphus, and the four Tattenhams, and Miss T.'s young man, and your humble servant, and Woffles — yes, most particularly Woffles — seriously incline. And time flies fast. We have just finished the most exciting tale of all, in which Jem, the faithful nigger, crawls from our watch-fire at hazard of his life, and cutting the painter of the canoe in which half a score of treacherous Indians lie concealed with the polite design of tomahawking us all when their peace-pretending chief shall have lulled us and our suspicions to sleep, launches the canoe into mid-stream, and dances a grotesque fandango of delight over his exploit; when, to our astonishment, we find that it is high time to land and boil our gipsy-kettle for tea. The wind gives signs of rising too, and though it is dead off shore the lake soon rises, and there is no time to waste. I have still a touch or two to put to my sketch of Arenig, and am working diligently that I may join the rest before the kettle boils, when somehow the mountain seems to be shifting its place. Then suddenly a small shrill whoop comes from the shore behind me, and, jumping to my feet, I see — Woffles, executing a triumphant war-dance, and find myself floating gently out to sea before the rising breeze.

RUSSIAN VILLAGE SCHOOLS.

In a hollow behind a hill lies the silent Russian village, buried beneath mountains of snow for four or five months in the year. It consists of one wide street, with twenty,

thirty, or forty wooden huts built at irregular intervals to right and left. They are too miserable looking, one would think, even for cattle to take shelter in, and their tiny windows are covered with fretted frost, or weep frosty tears that soon turn into an icy fringe. Sometimes not a trace of the street is to be seen; the snow has reached the roofs. It may well be asked, is there a school here, and is daily school-going possible? The affirmative answer is startling and unexpected. Winter is the only season of the year during which the peasant's child can go to school. The teacher is hired only for the winter months, and in spring, summer, and autumn, the schools are closed.

Russian village schools may be classed under two heads: the Zemstvo Free School and the Samorodney or People's School. The former were first opened some thirteen years ago under government auspices, and their expenses are defrayed by rates collected from gentlemen, land-owners, and rural communes; although receiving no grant from government, they are under government supervision, and are visited at stated intervals by government inspectors. The course of study laid down for them by the Minister of Public Instruction is reading, writing, the first two rules of arithmetic, and short religious stories, extracted from the early history of the Greek Church. None of the most elementary ideas of geography, or of national or natural history, are included. The teacher is badly paid, badly housed, and Russian distances and the Russian climate cut him off from the civilised world. These Zemstvo Schools are still very few and far between. There is only one for every hundred *versts* or so — that is to say, one for many thousands of children of both sexes. A Russian recruit with a certificate testifying to his having passed the three class examinations of the Zemstvo Free School has the privilege of serving four years in the Russian army, instead of the compulsory six years, but, notwithstanding this privilege, they are often badly attended. In the government of Iver, for instance, one hundred and nineteen thousand nine hundred and ninety roubles were spent last year on Zemstvo Schools, and yet according to government statistics more than ten thousand children belonging to the local population never frequented them.

The Samorodney or People's Schools are kept by the peasants themselves, are free from government control, and their existence dates back to a very lengthened period.

They are open in winter, close in early spring, and the teachers engaged are sacristans, choristers, retired soldiers, peasant lads (pupils of the Zemstvo Free Schools), and *proseernayas*, or women attached to Russian churches to bake the sacramental bread. The number of pupils in each Samorodney School varies from ten to thirty, and the teachers' terms vary also according to circumstances. A *proseernaya* who keeps school in her own hut receives sixty kopecks for teaching a child the thirty-six letters of the Russian alphabet, sixty more when he can read one or two prayers, seventy or eighty kopecks when he can read the psalms. For teaching him to write she charges one rouble, and with that his education ends; arithmetic is here an unknown luxury. The whole course of study, lasting two, or at the most three winters, costs twelve roubles for each child, a little more than a guinea (a sum which includes any outlay there may have been for books, pens, ink, paper), as well as sundry presents of milk, eggs, and *vatrooshkies*, or Russian home-made cakes, to the *proseernaya* school-mistress. But it often happens that the teacher chosen is a newcomer, and owns no house in the village. In that case a small empty *izba* is hired, for three or four roubles a winter, and each scholar is to supply fuel, and heat the earthen stove, in turn. Two roughly made tables are placed in the house. The children are divided into two classes, the readers and the writers, the former again being divided into alphabeters and psalmsters. They come to school at seven in the morning, leave at eight in the evening, and, during the course of the day, are only allowed an hour and a half for dinner and rest. The established punishment is beating with birch-rods: fifteen strokes for ordinary misdemeanours, and twenty-five or thirty for extraordinary ones. Towards spring, as may be expected, many of the young faces are pale and wrinkled, reminding one of little men grown old before their time. In some places the peasants are too poor to hire even the above-mentioned *izba* school, and teaching is carried on in each *izba* by turns till they come to the end of the village. Day after day, the teacher and his ink-bottle, with one or two books under his arm, passes from hut to hut followed by a crowd of white-faced, flax-haired children. He eats what they eat, i.e., black bread, potatoes, and dried mushrooms. The school-books are well taken care of,

and pass from generation to generation. The peasant who has not money enough to buy a sufficient quantity of black bread and salt to feed his family, has little money to spend on his children's school-books. His eldest son learns to write with one and the same nib for two whole winters; it then passes on to the next son, and is mended many times before being finally thrown away, quite incapable of writing any longer. The ink-store consists of a tiny bottle of ink poured into a wine-bottle, and then filled up with water. In warm, well-built *izbas* the scholars sit in their bright-coloured cotton shirts. In cold *izbas*, where the wind whistles through crannies, and where the earthen floor is damp and uneven, they sit in a variety of costumes. One has on his father's sheep-skin coat; another that of his mother, sister, or elder brother; a third is dressed in a long dark-blue cloth kaftan, and most of them are in simply indescribable rags. Long felt boots or cold baste shoes cover their stockingless feet. The hut is dark and low-ceilinged. The picture of a Russian saint hangs in the corner opposite the door. Iron nails dot the walls, with all manner of household garments hanging on them. In the centre of the room stands a cupboard or an immense wooden box, but far oftener, a cradle hanging from the roof with an eternally-crying baby. Narrow wooden benches are round the room, and a stove made of fuller's earth and sand is built in one corner. On it and on the benches the different members of the family sleep at night. Add to this the trunk of a tree hollowed out into a washing-trough, one or two wooden or earthen bowls, pails, horse-collars, reins, axes, and wooden spades, and you have the rest of the furniture. In a Russian peasant's hut there is but one room, and, lessons or no lessons, the household work must be carried on as usual. The harassed and irritable peasant-mother washes, and gets dinner, and feeds the cattle, and caresses and beats her noisy little ones in turns, in the presence of school and school-master; lambs, pigs, dogs, and fowls are also there.

The peasants prefer these Samorodney schools to the better appointed Zemstvo Free Schools: firstly, because they are close at hand, only a few doors away; and secondly, because their children can here learn to read and write (in a very sorry fashion, it is true) in the short space of six or nine months, and can then be kept at home and begin to work for ten or fifteen

kopecks a day. Winter is the only season during which they can spare their children. In spring, summer, and autumn they must supply the place of elder brothers taken for soldiers, and do men's work in the house and in the field. And yet, as may be seen, both parents and children equally prize the magic art of reading and writing! It brings the letter from the far-away soldier-son, and often does it enable the elders to avoid the double and illegal payment of taxes, passport money, and various police documents. On Sundays and Saints'-days they gather round the school-master and listen attentively to the newspaper, borrowed from land-owner, priest, or Zemstvo School teacher. It is true, this reading is not always satisfactory. The Samorodney teacher reads at the rate of a steam-engine, without paying the least attention to stops or accents. The peasants stare at him in silence, stroke their beards—and how are they to understand, since he does not understand a word of what he is reading himself? He can write—slowly, to be sure, can count up to a thousand, and knows addition and subtraction. Multiplication and division are beyond him, and did not enter into the programme of the Zemstvo School where he received his education. He receives from ten to twenty roubles a winter from the united village, lives by turn in every izba, and has but little love for his vocation. He will be taken for the army in another year or two, and in the meanwhile prefers teaching to field-work. The peasants hire him because they have no means to engage a better, and because, being a peasant himself, he is willing to put up with their food, and sleep on their stoves at night.

The retired soldier is a teacher of the worst description. He is rough and brutal; whips, beats, and pinches most unmercifully. He is drunk every Saint's-day, and for more than half the week is absent from his duty. When he does return to school, he easily re-establishes his dignity by telling the children of the grand parade when he saw "The White Czar," or of some foreign land he marched through, a land that was bright and sunny, with marble palaces, orange-groves, and glittering seas. The simple-minded children listen with bated breath, and running home under the impression of his tale, gleams of awe and wonder light up their tired blue eyes. Truly the scene around is very different to the land described by the soldier-school-master: a winding-sheet of deepest snow

on field and meadow; ice-bound rivers, ponds, and lakes; forests of beech and lime in their weird white shrouds; and the tolling of some far-away church bell alone to break the cold and solemn silence.

SET IN A SILVER SEA.

BY B. L. FARJEON.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. HAROLD AND MAUVAIN VISIT THE HUNCHBACK.

FOR some time he remained in contemplation, mentally reviewing the events of the years which had elapsed since his return to his mother's hut in Mauvain's forest, where he had found the dead woman and the sleeping child lying side by side.

"With my mother, as I thought," mused he, "died certain evidence connected with Evangeline which would never be brought to light. But another lives to supply it, and she is in the valley, waiting. Something still remains to do—to bring to Mauvain and Harold the knowledge of each other's treachery; when that is accomplished, my labours are at an end. By their own hands, or by the hands of the judges of this isle, shall justice be dealt out to them. My work in life seems already to be over, and all that is left to me is to sit and watch the happiness of those I love, and who hold me, I believe, in something more than common regard. Evangeline and Joseph Sylvester will marry; he has a strong arm and a stout heart, and will be able to guard his treasure from evil. My tender flower! You will never know what I owe you, for none but I can realise the dark depths into which my soul was plunged when, in the presence of death, you opened your eyes and smiled upon me. That smile was like the bursting of a star within my heart, and the light it shed upon the dark and weary path I was treading shines clearly now. Yes, they will marry, and will pass their lives in the house I have built for them in the Valley of Lilies; and by-and-by, perhaps, I shall hold a child within these arms—Evangeline's child! And it will be taught to lisp my name in accents of affection. Eternal wonder of Nature! To what end are you working in the ages yet to come, through life that is ever sweet and love that is ever new! For my life and for myself I thank you, wise mother of the world. You have given me a rich reward for my early years of misery. I am grateful. Shall I repine that a child of my blood has never wound its arms

about my neck, and that my lips have never given or received a lover's kiss? No; let me rather rejoice that no being lives to bear my shape, and that my days have not been productive of evil."

At this point of his musings Ranf fancied he heard a sound without, and going to the door of his hut, he threw it open. There was no moon, and there would be none, for a couple of hours; darkness was falling upon the mountain.

"It is well," muttered Ranf, "that Margaret Sylvester has Joseph with her; they will reach the valleys in safety, and I shall know by the lighting up of my house, 'Chrysanthos,' whether all is well. That will not be till midnight."

From where he stood he faced the Valley of Lilies, but he could not distinguish his house through the gathering darkness. Mentally he followed the footsteps of Margaret and Joseph.

"They are now at the second hut," he muttered; "there is no danger on the road."

* * * *

But lower down the mountain the mists had gathered more thickly, and lingered in the middle distance. Margaret and Joseph, hand clasped in hand, slowly pursued their way; they reached the second hut in safety, and half an hour afterwards, Joseph said:

"In less than an hour we shall be home." His heart glowed with love; although his mother was by his side, it was only of Evangeline he thought. As he spoke, the form of a man ascending the mountain brushed past them. Margaret uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"Who goes there?" was asked, in a man's voice.

"Hush!" whispered Margaret; "I know that voice; do not answer it."

But again the question was asked. "Who goes there? Speak, or my sword shall compel you."

"Peaceable inhabitants of the isle," replied Joseph, "who are not to be frightened by threats. Who are you that question so insolently?"

"It is Mauvain," whispered Margaret.

The man caught the whisper. "You are right, whoever you may be," said Mauvain; "and you can go your way in peace. Come you from the hunchback's hut?"

"Yes."

"I was told no mortal but he dare ascend this cursed mount."

"It is the first time we ever set foot upon it."

"It is the same with me; and shall be

the last. He is at home, then, this crooked wonder?"

"You will find him in his hut at the top of the mountain," said Joseph.

"Joseph?" cried Margeret, in terror; "what have you done? That man is Ranf's enemy!"

"Ah, mistress, I recognise your voice," said Mauvain; "it is true I am Ranf's enemy. But if you think he is in any secret danger from me, you are mistaken. What is done between us will be done openly. The hunchback can take care of himself."

"Aye," said Joseph. "Ranf is a match for more than one. It is better to be his friend than his enemy. If your errand is not peaceable, I should advise you to retrace your steps."

"Is the road upward passably safe?"

"There is a fair track to the top, made by Ranf, the work of many years; but care is needed."

"Mistress," said Mauvain, "did Harold visit you?"

"He did."

"And you are ready to worship him as a model of excellence and virtue?"

"You are villains, both of you," replied Margaret, with indignation; "your presence in this isle is a blot upon the land."

"You wrong the man who was once my friend," said Mauvain gently; "he is worthy both of friendship and love. It has never been my fate to meet with a gentleman more deserving of trust and confidence. Good-night."

But neither Margaret nor Joseph returned the salutation, and Mauvain pursued his lonely way.

* * * *

Ranf once more fancied he heard the sound of a man's voice; it was faint and indistinct, but upon listening intently it came to his ears more clearly, and it was his own name he seemed to hear.

"Ranf! Ranf!"

He walked downwards in the direction of the sound, and cried: "Is it mortal or spirit who calls my name?"

"In honest faith," was the answer, "at this moment it is mortal; but if you are not quick, I shall lose my hold on earth, literally and spiritually."

Every foot of the mountain was familiar to the hunchback, and he knew that the voice proceeded from one of the most dangerous passes. He needed no light to guide him, and in a few moments he was on his knees by the side of a precipice over

which the body of a man was hanging in the most perilous position. The man had caught hold of the thin twisted roots of a slender tree, which by good fortune had been laid bare by the rains, but his hold was growing weaker, and his desperate grasp and endeavours to raise himself had loosened the earth about the young roots to such an extent that, if he had been left to himself, his fate would have been speedy and certain. Ranf peered into the man's face.

"Harold the sculptor!"

"Ranf the hunchback!"

Ranf spoke with a frown; Harold, in almost a blithe tone.

"Beg your life!" cried Ranf.

"I do, most humbly," said Harold, with a faint laugh.

But before Ranf made this demand, his arm was around the sinking man.

"Gently, gently," said Harold; "I am hurt. Ah! it is well. Take care; do not tear my vest; there are memorials here in the shape of flowers—flowers—from the grave— Oh, God, I thank thee!"

And being safe upon solid earth, Harold swooned away.

Ranf did not pause to decide upon his course of action. He raised the insensible body, and bore it with some tenderness to his hut, where he laid it upon his bed.

"Not dead," he muttered, as he placed his hand upon Harold's heart. "What are these? Flowers, as he said, and not quite withered. From whose grave?"

Harold opened his eyes, and for a little while the men gazed at each other in silence. Then Harold said faintly:

"If I had been told that I should ever have owed my life to you, my friend and foe, I should have laughed in the speaker's face. I hate and despise you to such a degree that the obligation you have laid me under is somewhat of a bitter joke. Give me my flowers, Ranf. A short time since I was beginning to admire you; better than that, I was beginning, as I believed, to do you justice. But I have discovered that a deformed man is not necessarily a noble and exemplary being, and where once I despised, now I hate you."

"I would not have it otherwise," said Ranf.

"To rob a man," continued Harold, "at a critical crisis in his life, of the respect and sympathy of a good woman—to do this by what must be slander—is the work of a coward—and you are one! It was to tell you this that I determined to beard

you in your den—such as you deserve no better lodgment. In the dark, missing the path, I slipped, and found myself hanging between earth and—well, that point is yet to be made clear to my comprehension. Have you any food in your hut?"

"I have."

"Give me some, and I will pay for it in my heart's blood, or yours. I am at the present moment so weak and famished that if you were to press your fingers on my throat, I should not have strength to resist an abrupt introduction into another world. I have not tasted food since yesterday morning. Without being much of an arithmetician, I should say I have a thirty-six hours' hunger upon me; and as you may guess, hunchback, I have hitherto lived upon the fat of the land, and have never known want—which makes my case worse than that of a poor wretch who is used to starvation. Then I am hurt; my left arm is terribly gashed. Nay, let it alone; it will not be improved by your nursing. Give me food, coward and slanderer!"

Ranf placed food upon the table, and two bottles of wine, and Harold rose without assistance, and pouring into a wooden measure full half of a bottle, drank it in one long, deep, satisfying draught. Setting down the measure, he partook of the food, justifying his plea of hunger by the eagerness with which he ate.

"I am strong again," he said; "I retract a word I have twice applied to you. Ranf, you are no coward—but you must have within your breast the heart of a fiend. As I was toiling up this mountain there passed by me a man and a woman. They almost discovered me, but I succeeded in keeping myself from their sight. Have they been here?"

"Yes."

"It will not interest me to learn upon what errand—but it must have been a momentous one that a woman should be impelled to undertake such a journey."

"Truly the mountain is growing in repute," said Ranf; "this is a memorable day in its history. You have promised to pay for the food you have eaten in your heart's blood, or mine. The payment will be sufficient; I shall exact it."

"Nothing will please me better. But you are unarmed; I have my sword, as you see."

Ranf produced two rapiers, and placed them on the table. "The moon is rising," he said; "it will be light soon upon the mountain, and we shall find a piece of level

ground without—an altar upon which you shall meet with justice. God has sent you here to meet it, and on this night, at this hour, of all nights and hours in our lives. I would not change shapes with you for the wealth of the stars. You are not worth even a hunchback's hate."

"It may be as you say," said Harold thoughtfully, "and that this hour may be my last. For my part, I am weary of life, and shall yield it up not unwillingly. But before we cross swords—I had no idea, Ranf, that you were skilled in fence, but you are admirable in everything it seems—I would have something made plain to me. It will be light enough outside for our purpose, but light is required here"—he touched his breast. "Yesterday it was in my power to bring relief to the heart of a suffering woman?"

"Use names," said Ranf sternly; "the time is past for subterfuge."

"Not before yesterday was I made acquainted with the true particulars of the story of Margaret and Clarice; I learnt them in an interview with Mauvain, and, renouncing his friendship—I have touched you, I perceive; you are but a clumsy wizard, after all—I went at once to Margaret Sylvester, and revealed to her all that I had learned. For my innocent share in Clarice's sad story——"

"Innocent share!" exclaimed Ranf, with deepest scorn; "you proclaim that to me, who but an hour ago gave that wronged unhappy woman's confession into the hands of her sister!"

"For my innocent share," repeated Harold, "in that sad story, I do not hold myself blameless; I am guilty, and deserve punishment and condemnation—but not at your hands, hunchback—at the hands of a higher Power. Yet have I done no wrong, and had I known what I have lately learnt I would have shed my best blood in Clarice's service. Never was man more repentant—never was man more heart-stricken than I—when, won to Margaret Sylvester's side by her almost saintly devotion and courage, I went to her house, and related to her all that I knew. Will it help you to an understanding of my feelings if I tell you that I loved Clarice with a most earnest love, and that if I had not been misled and deceived by my friend, her life might have been happy and honoured? Take it for what you deem it worth—it is the truth. Then, when Margaret Sylvester, judging me by an inward light, believing in my sympathy and my

sorrow, held out to me the hand of forgiveness—when, knowing I had no roof to cover me, no soul to speak to in all the length and breadth of this Silver Isle, she begged me to accept—Heaven bless her for it!—the hospitality of her home—you, by a slanderous message, destroy my hope, and rob me of the sweetest comfort that was ever offered to the heart of an unhappy man. What was in your message concerning me?"

"I told her that I knew she had visited Mauvain; I warned her to believe not a word she heard from your lips or from Mauvain's; I said that for your own purposes you would lie and lie—and that of the two you were the more subtle villain of the two—as I should prove to her by the written testimony of her own sister."

"I can understand now why she turned me from her house. But if you have done me a wrong and come to the knowledge of it, you would right me."

"You, or any man."

"Have you proved to Margaret Sylvester what you promised?"

"I have proved it to her this very night. She departed from this hut with the proofs of your villainy in her possession."

"Ranf, you are mad—or dreaming!" Ranf smiled scornfully. "There is here a deeper mystery than any I have encountered. It must not remain so. My honour is at stake. Deal with me fairly, as man to man. Cast aside for a little while all suspicion of me, and assist me to probe the heart of this mystery. I met Clarice first by accident, in Mauvain's company, on the night on which she and Margaret were treacherously separated. From that night I saw neither her nor Mauvain for two years, and when we met again she and Mauvain were together. I saw that Clarice was unhappy—that she had a secret grief, and at times I urged her, out of the deep respect and sympathy I had for her—out of the deep love I bore her, but of which I never insulted her by speaking—to confide in me. Honestly I desired to help her; but she kept her heart closed, saying sometimes that of all men in the world I was the man she would have chosen to confide in, had not her faith and trust in human nature been irretrievably shattered. Farther than that I never went; nor did she. To the last day I beheld her I treated her with such tenderness and respect as I would have treated an honoured sister. Now,

what grounds have you for slandering me, and for bringing her name in injurious connection with mine?"

"Did Mauvain have another friend of the name of Harold?"

"None other."

"Had you a friend, bearing your name?"

"No."

"The testimony which convicts you is written by Clarice herself in a Bible given to her by her father; that Bible is now in Margaret Sylvester's hands. It is in the form of a diary, written by Clarice from day to day, in which she describes the manner in which she was wooed and betrayed. That record is one of almost incredible baseness, and the name of her lover and betrayer is freely used. The name is Harold—and you are he!"

"As there is a heaven above us, and a God around us," cried Harold, "whatever name is there written, it is not I! Do you know the truth when you hear it, or is your mind as crooked as your body? Again I repeat, I treated Clarice as an honoured sister. Except in believing what Mauvain told me of her, I never wronged the suffering girl in thought or deed!"

Ranf gazed steadily at Harold, who met his gaze unflinchingly.

"If what you say is true," said Ranf, "you have been grievously slandered—but not by me, nor by Clarice. Search your mind for a clue."

"I can find none."

"Absolutely none?"

"Absolutely none."

A singular smile crossed Ranf's lips, and he inclined his head to the door. "Do you hear nothing?"

"Nothing."

"My ears have been more keenly trained to sound than yours. There are steps upon the mountain—listen now; they are approaching, nearer—nearer." He threw open the door; the mountain was bathed in moonlight—and coming up the path was a man whose face was set towards the hut. "You should know him," said Ranf.

"It is Mauvain," said Harold, almost in a whisper.

"It is Mauvain," replied Ranf. "Can you not find a clue in your mind to this false use of your name? if it be false, as you may soon discover. Is it not possible that Clarice's lover for some time concealed his own name and wooed her in the name of an absent friend? The deception could not be kept up for ever, and when it was confessed, it neither lessened

nor added to her shame. Say that this is possible—what near friend would occur to your mind as likely to use you for his purpose?"

"Mauvain!" cried Harold.

"Aye, Mauvain," said Ranf; and at that moment Mauvain came straight through the moonlight, and stood upon the threshold of the hut.

CHAPTER XXXIX. THE CHALLENGE.

"WELCOME," said Ranf, with a bright glitter in his eyes. "Had you timed your visit with mathematical precision, it could not have been more opportune. I never hoped for the honour of receiving Mauvain beneath roof of mine; this is a night in my life not to be forgotten."

Mauvain did not immediately speak; the presence of Harold surprised him, and he looked from one to the other in irresolution and doubt. Harold said no word, but kept his eyes fixed upon Mauvain's face, with a stern and thoughtful meaning.

Ranf continued: "Have you come to bring me news from the old world? I left so many friends there, who are doubtless anxious for my welfare! It is long since we met, Mauvain; you have aged. I miss a certain brightness in you; hearing footsteps on the mount, I observed that they lacked elasticity and lightness; and indeed your whole manner is wanting in gaiety. Without doubt your journey must have fatigued you, but you have certainly aged; your time is coming! Mauvain, there is wine; I have drunk at your expense; drink now at mine. No? Well, I confess it is presumptuous in me to expect the condescension. To business, then. What brings you here?"

"I am here," said Mauvain deliberately, "to punish a knave for presumption, and to teach him that it is dangerous to use the name of his betters as freely as I have reason to suppose you have used mine."

"There are more ways than one of using names," retorted Ranf, "as you may presently learn."

"Were you what you once were," said Mauvain, "a serf and dependent of mine, I would have you whipped."

"As you have had others, standing by the while to enjoy the torture and the degradation of what was possibly a higher nature than your own. Such enjoyment cannot now be yours; we are in a free land. How, then, do you propose to punish my presumption? By physical or

moral force? In either case, Mauvain, you would find yourself at a disadvantage."

"I cannot lift you to my level; I descend to yours. You have rapiers on the table. I commence my lesson thus." He raised his jewelled cane, and was advancing towards Ranf when Harold interposed.

"This quarrel is mine, Mauvain; you must first give me satisfaction."

Mauvain recoiled, and his cane dropped to the ground.

"I thought, Harold, we had settled our affairs."

"So thought I; but within this last hour I have had cause to believe that you have fixed a deeper wrong upon me than any I have endured."

"Within this last hour! Then you have heard it from the lips of that knave!"

"It is through Ranf I have learnt it."

"And you would set his word against mine, Harold!"

"No. Am I free to speak, Ranf?"

"Entirely free. It is your honour that is at stake, not mine."

"If I find you have deceived me, your life shall answer for it."

"This is no time for threat or boast. Settle first with him. He will neither lie nor equivocate; if he does either, I have a witness in the valley below"—he looked out of the door, which was open; the mists were rolling away, and the moonlight shone over the lovely plains—"I have a witness in the valley below who will bring his shame and his guilt home to him."

"You are in league, I perceive," said Mauvain haughtily. "What deeper wrong than any you have advanced have I done you?"

"If what I suspect is true," said Harold, "you have used my name for a base and shameful purpose. Once more I recall the name of Clarice. You know in what esteem I held her. You know I loved her, and how through her, by means of your own calumnious words with respect to her, I lost my faith in woman's purity. Was it necessary that you should be guilty of a double betrayal? Was it necessary to your purpose that you should woo an innocent, trusting, helpless girl, and bring her to shame, in the name of a friend, con-

cealing your own because you were fearful of using it?"

A deadly pallor crept over Mauvain's face.

"Learn something more," said Ranf to Harold; "in that friend's name a ceremony was performed which Clarice believed was an honourable marriage. It was a trick, worthy of what had gone before."

Harold's lips quivered at this new testimony, and his face grew as white as Mauvain's.

"I await your answer," he said. "Did you thus use my name, and conceal your own? You will not speak? By Heaven you shall!"

Mauvain raised his hand gently.

"There is no need for violent words, Harold," he said, in a low, soft voice. "What I did was done with no intent to injure you."

"Jesuit!" cried Harold. "I will have an answer, straight to the point! Did you woo Clarice, and go through a false marriage with her, in my name? Answer, as you are a gentleman—yes or no!"

"Yes."

Harold covered his face with his hands, as though to shut out the consciousness of villainy so base. For a minute or two there was silence. Then Harold rose, and saying sternly, "There remains but this," took one of the rapiers from the table, and pointed outside. "Ranf, you will conduct us to your plot of level ground—your altar of justice. Come," he said to Mauvain, "there is no question of inequality between us."

But Mauvain did not stir.

"I cannot fight with you, Harold," he said tenderly.

"You must! There is no escape for you or me. It is the last night on earth for one."

Mauvain looked at him with wistful, imploring eyes.

"Harold!"

"You hesitate still! Coward!" and with his open hand, Harold struck Mauvain full in the face.

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